

**GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION OF  
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Sheraton Hotel  
Anchorage, Alaska**

**September 24, 2007**

11 PUBLIC TESTIMONY

12

13 MS. BISBEE: We'll introduce ourselves  
14 first so you know what you're dealing with here. Do  
15 you want to start down there?

16 MS. LEWIS: I'm Christine Lewis from  
17 Juneau.

18 MR. BURTON: Jim Burton, Fairbanks.

19 MR. BOYNTON: Ron Boynton.

20 MS. O'CONNOR: SueEllen O'Connor.

21 MS. SIMPSON: Becky Simpson.

22 MS. DIEBELS-PARAMORE: Liza

23 Diebels-Paramore.

24 MS. TOOYAK: Pinky Tooyak.

25 MS. BISBEE: Jackie Bisbee.

1 MS. O'KEEFE: Joan O'Keefe.

2 MS. ELSTAD: Velja Elstad from Juneau.

3 MS. BISBEE: Thank you for joining us.

4 The Governor's Committee on Employment and

5 Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities quarterly

6 meeting, and we don't have a real full house today, so

7 take your time.

8 MS. DIEBELS-PARAMORE: The floor is

9 yours.

10 MR. JACKSON: It's going to be kind of

11 tough, I'm going to keep it short. I put a few teeth

12 through my bottom lip yesterday skiing and it's

13 painful to talk.

14 My name is Grant Jackson, I work for

15 Stone Soup Group right now, nice to meet you. I'm the

16 PTI parent navigator over there. I'm a board member

17 on the Alaska Brain Injury Network and have been for a

18 couple years now. And previous to that Stone Soup I

19 lived and worked in Dillingham as the director for

20 Hope Community Resources for four years, and I'm now

21 working at Stone Soup as the parent navigator and

22 working primarily with the school district and  
23 families in the Anchorage area. And I wanted to come  
24 and just kind of let you guys know that I do intend to  
25 apply for the PTI board seat with you guys.

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1 MS. ELSTAD: We've been looking for you  
2 for some time.

3 MR. JACKSON: Great.

4 MS. ELSTAD: I'm happy we found you.

5 MS. BISBEE: Please apply quickly.

6 MR. JACKSON: I've got the application  
7 filled out.

8 MS. DIEBELS-PARAMORE: I'm not really  
9 familiar. What's a parent navigator?

10 MR. JACKSON: Basically what I've been  
11 doing is working, families call me, many times it's  
12 been Disability Law Center, and they are having an  
13 issue with the school district, you know, special  
14 education, and the family feels they are not being  
15 provided something they should be provided for their

16 child, and I help them walk through the system, get  
17 them to work with the school, with Disability Law.

18 MR. BOYNTON: Could you use the mic so  
19 we can hear you.

20 MR. JACKSON: So it's basically kind of  
21 information and referral for families, kids in the  
22 special education or, you know, can it be many things,  
23 different community resources, just linking families  
24 with what they need help with.

25 MS. BISBEE: Questions?

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1 MS. ELSTAD: I've got just a really  
2 quick one. How long have you guys been a recipient of  
3 this grant? Is this -- you're going on your second  
4 year, right.

5 MR. JACKSON: We're going on the second  
6 year. Previous it was Parents, Inc. I believe we're  
7 going on the second year.

8 MS. ELSTAD: I think you're right. Has  
9 that changed your mission much since you've been the

10 recipient of that grant.

11 MR. JACKSON: I can't speak to that too  
12 much since I've only been there a month now. But I  
13 don't believe so. They have several areas they are  
14 focusing on and several areas that they haven't been  
15 able to accomplish, so I know they will focus on  
16 things they haven't in the previous years, so I can't  
17 speak to what those are.

18 MS. ELSTAD: I'm just happy you came to  
19 testify, so thank you so much.

20 MR. BOYNTON: What kind of caseload do  
21 you have?

22 MR. JACKSON: Well, it's kind of -- you  
23 know, things come and go, families -- most of the  
24 families I've talked to I've been working with so far  
25 are kind of out of my hands now. The problem has

1 worked itself out, or I've helped them deal with the  
2 school district, and things are taken care of, but  
3 there are several that will be more long term. But

4 it's generally a month or less seems like the time  
5 frame where we work with the family.

6 MS. SIMPSON: So I just want to note  
7 that since it's taken so long to find an actual  
8 applicant, can you refrain from any high risk sports  
9 activities, no more skiing.

10 MR. JACKSON: I don't think I can  
11 promise that, that's why I moved to Alaska.

12 MS. TOOYAK: What did you say your name  
13 was?

14 MR. JACKSON: Grant Jackson.

15 MS. BISBEE: Thank you, Grant. Do you  
16 want to hand the microphone to Pinky, she's got  
17 written testimony.

18 MS. TOOYAK: I've been asked to read a,  
19 I guess one sheet. It's a fax to Carol Stephens on  
20 the 13th. It was received from a gentleman named  
21 Brian McCrum out of Palmer. Subject is Voc Rehab  
22 testimony.

23 To all the folks involved with  
24 disability and rehabilitation, I'm hard pressed to  
25 find fault with your methods. Sometimes I felt it

1 took a while to get and keep things rolling, but  
2 really that worked out to my good as it forced me to  
3 be positive and sure of my program. People who worked  
4 with me were helpful and kind, in addition to  
5 knowledgeable. SueEllen O'Connor, my counselor of the  
6 Wasilla branch, is a doll. Alaska voc and counseling  
7 stood and still stands by me with interest. Thanks  
8 guys, you're the best.

9 MS. WALSH: Did you sign that?

10 MS. BISBEE: Sincerely SueEllen.

11 MS. O'KEEFE: To the Governor's  
12 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People  
13 with Disabilities public meeting. My name is Tamara  
14 Roberts, and I'm a recent graduate of the APU teacher  
15 education program. I'm currently a teacher of a  
16 two/three combo classroom in Anchorage today as a  
17 result of the assistance I received from the  
18 Department of Rehabilitation after I became unable to  
19 perform the job that I had done for 15 years in the  
20 shoe repair business due to becoming chronically ill  
21 with hepatitis C.

22 I received a chemotherapeutic treatment  
23 of pegylated Interferon with riboviron which made me  
24 even more ill for a year and from which it took  
25 several years to overcome the side effects of this

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1 treatment after completion.

2 If it had not been for the Department of  
3 Vocational Rehabilitation assisting me with my  
4 educational retraining from the job I could no longer  
5 perform due to my illness, I would not be a teacher  
6 today.

7 I had many obstacles to overcome while  
8 on treatment and going back to school while undergoing  
9 treatment was not an easy task, but with the help of  
10 the counselors at DVR and the tutoring they helped me  
11 to receive when I was at my struggling to survive a  
12 difficult time in my life, I was able to succeed and  
13 graduate with honors in the winter of 2005.

14 I could not have done this without the  
15 help of this program and will be forever grateful to

16 the people that helped me along the way to reach this  
17 goal at a time when I was uncertain of my future and  
18 unable to work.

19 I'm happy to say that my treatment was a  
20 success and I'm free of the hepatitis virus and  
21 working with a bright future. Because DVR was there  
22 for me when I needed them most I can now be here for  
23 Alaska's children as a classroom teacher.

24 I realize that not all the people who  
25 seek the assistance of DVR when they are ill or

1 disabled make the progress that I did, but I'm writing  
2 to ask that those who have the power to help others  
3 keep in mind that there are all people like myself who  
4 can and do get better and do succeed with a little  
5 help from the state.

6 Please know that I am an avid supporter  
7 of this program and I do hope that you'll be there for  
8 those who come after me. Not a lot of help is  
9 available for those who are disabled or uninsured.

10 Education is the stepping stone to help those who  
11 cannot afford to go to college or be retrained in a  
12 profession once they are ill. I did not have a means  
13 or insurance to help me with educational expenses.

14 I have a career, my health insurance  
15 today, as a result of this assistance provided by DVR  
16 with the help of Beth Tusten and a few others  
17 throughout my educational transition from disability  
18 to health and reemployment, I'm helping others and  
19 myself.

20 I wish to say thank you for your support  
21 during some very difficult times in my life. I hope  
22 my letter, though is short, will help to put a voice  
23 to those they serve and help. Vocational  
24 Rehabilitation is a needed service in Alaska and is  
25 one of the things that make Alaska a more better and

1 more human place to live if you should find yourself  
2 disabled one day.

3 Many of us are only a paycheck or two

4 away from being underprivileged. Only once you have  
5 been in this situation can you truly know how  
6 difficult it is to live without a job or limited  
7 support. Please continue to fund DVR in the future.  
8 Alaska citizens need this service and Alaska needs  
9 productive working citizens a little education can  
10 provide.

11 We all grow as a people when our  
12 citizens are educated and working. Please keep up the  
13 good work in the future. Sincerely, Tamara Roberts,  
14 elementary teacher.

15 MS. BISBEE: Anybody on the phone,  
16 Velja?

17 MS. ELSTAD: This is the Governor's  
18 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People  
19 with Disabilities. We're taking public comment. Is  
20 there anybody on line that would like to testify  
21 today? Thank you. No one on line.

22 MS. BISBEE: Jay Keener. If you would  
23 come up here and sit among us.

24 MR. KEENER: Thank you. Well, I'm Jay  
25 Keener, and I wasn't really prepared to talk, but I'll

1 take this opportunity to talk about my work with DVR.

2 I'd like to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation.

3 And I had a case which was closed due to my-- well,

4 it seems that my disability is too significant to be

5 rehabilitated, I'm non-rehabilitatable. I don't

6 believe that's true. I'm absolutely sure I can work.

7 Well, I just came to learn more and

8 wasn't really prepared to talk, but I just said a

9 little bit, and if anybody has a question, I'd be able

10 to answer it.

11 MS. SIMPSON: Jay, thanks for coming

12 today. You have applied for DVR services?

13 MR. KEENER: Yes.

14 MS. SIMPSON: How long ago?

15 MR. KEENER: It started about ten years

16 ago, and my case went on for, I think, seven years,

17 but then was closed because I did not progress as

18 quickly as maybe I should have.

19 MS. SIMPSON: You're from the Anchorage

20 area?

21 MR. KEENER: Yes.

22 MS. O'CONNOR: Can I ask you a question.  
23 Would you be interested in having somebody from DVR  
24 call you to talk about services and whether it's a  
25 good time to consider coming back or not?

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1 MR. KEENER: Yes, I would.  
2 MS. BISBEE: Could you give Carol your  
3 address and telephone number? I've got it right here.  
4 We could arrange for someone to give you a call.  
5 MR. KEENER: Okay, thank you.  
6 MS. WALSH: Uh-huh.  
7 MS. SIMPSON: During that period of  
8 time, were you aware of the Client Assistance Program?  
9 MR. KEENER: Yes, and I did use Pam  
10 Stratton. She helped me with that case, or tried to.  
11 Just didn't -- my case worker changed a couple times  
12 and I shouldn't speculate on what really happened.  
13 MS. SIMPSON: But you're willing to try  
14 again?  
15 MR. KEENER: Yes, I am.

16 MS. SIMPSON: Perseverance.  
17 MR. KEENER: Patient persistence or  
18 patient endurance or something.  
19 MS. SIMPSON: How did you hear about the  
20 meeting today?  
21 MR. KEENER: Well, a friend of mine, I  
22 was in Partners in Policy Making with Jesse, her name  
23 is Jesse, she'll be receiving an award tomorrow, and  
24 it was through an e-mail that's going around that I  
25 heard about this meeting, and thought I would like to

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1 come.  
2 MS. O'CONNOR: Glad you did.  
3 MR. KEENER: Thanks. So am I, I think  
4 so.  
5 MS. BISBEE: Thank you, Jay. She needs  
6 to get your phone number. You don't have to give it  
7 to all of us, just her.  
8 MS. ELSTAD: Becky, I'm going to check  
9 the phone real quick. Is there anybody on line that

10 would like to testify today? This is the Governor's  
11 Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People  
12 with Disabilities? No one on line.

13 MS. SIMPSON: I've been asked to read a  
14 faxed memo. To the Governor's Committee on Employment  
15 and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities.

16 I am in a rehabilitation and training  
17 program with the DVR here in Wasilla Alaska. My case  
18 worker is Mercedes Henry. As a client in this program  
19 I would like to express my appreciation for the  
20 involvement and guidance that the DVR has provided me  
21 for an opportunity to find a way to receive the  
22 training and the education that I need to be able to  
23 change to a viable career.

24 I can no longer work in the construction  
25 and welding field I did for over 30 years because of a

1 degenerative condition. The cartilage is almost  
2 completely gone in my knee, which makes it impossible  
3 to climb ladders and carry any kind of weight, walking

4 or climbing.

5 I'm now enrolled with the Alaska  
6 Technology Learning Center. After I complete my  
7 course study I will be certified as an IT computer  
8 tech, which will open doors for me in a new field that  
9 is very much in demand in today's work force. DVR has  
10 paid for enrollment, tuition, books, material and lab  
11 fees, all of which I would not have been able to pay  
12 for myself and would not have been able to get this  
13 opportunity that I am now receiving.

14 I also have a hearing loss due to a lot  
15 of exposure to loud noise over the years in my old  
16 field of work. DVR has also provided the testing,  
17 examination, and evaluation so I could have hearing  
18 aids that have also been provided. This has made a  
19 tremendous impact in my life to be able to hear  
20 clearly again.

21 DVR also provided an independent  
22 counseling service to help evaluate my potential in  
23 finding a new career path. Darcy Logan with the  
24 Alaska Vocational and Counseling Services, Inc. has  
25 also provided positive guidance and understanding

1 towards my job options. I'm very grateful for all  
2 that has been provided by the DVR and the support that  
3 I have had now and in the future. Sincerely, Patrick  
4 J. Glenn.

5 MS. BISBEE: Thank you. Do you want to  
6 check the phone?

7 MS. ELSTAD: Good afternoon, this is the  
8 Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation  
9 of People with Disabilities. We're taking public  
10 comment. Is there anybody on line today that would  
11 like to testify?

12 MS. MAHAM: My name is Mary Maham.

13 MS. ELSTAD: Could you spell your last  
14 name for me?

15 MS. MAHAM: M-a-h-a-m.

16 MS. ELSTAD: Thank you so much for  
17 calling in. The Governor's Committee is standing by  
18 and ready to take your comment.

19 MS. MAHAM: I got in touch with DVR,  
20 it's been over a year ago, and I'm going to be going  
21 to work here very soon hopefully. They helped me with

22 my feet, because my back is messed up, and they helped  
23 me out with my feet so I can stand all day so I can  
24 work. And they are helping me with job search and  
25 unemployment office, and I wanted to tell them thank

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1 you very much for helping me.

2 MS. ELSTAD: Well, thank you so much for  
3 calling in today and sharing your thoughts. Thanks so  
4 much.

5 MS. MAHAM: Thank you.

6 MS. BISBEE: Christine has a written  
7 testimony.

8 MS. LEWIS: I've been asked to read some  
9 comment, this is a letter to the Governor's Committee  
10 on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with  
11 Disabilities. It's dated June 19th, 2007.

12 I would like to share a few of my  
13 thoughts regarding my experience with the Department  
14 of Vocational Rehabilitation over the last few months.

15 I have been on Social Security

16 Disability for over ten years. During that time I've  
17 had periods where I considered returning to work, but  
18 how to begin that process was so overwhelming that I  
19 didn't pursue the matter. I decided I would give Voc  
20 Rehab a shot, but being the cynic that I am, I didn't  
21 have much faith that I would find much benefit. I'm  
22 pleased to say I was sorely mistaken.

23 I was fortunate that I was assigned to a  
24 knowledgeable and resourceful counselor who put forth  
25 the effort to assess my needs who recommended

1 available resources within DVR and the community and  
2 provided appropriate feedback and guidance in my  
3 decision making process.

4 My counselor recommended that I attend  
5 Job Club which I feel has been a tremendous benefit.

6 The staff associated with Job Club and the Resource  
7 Center has been professional and extremely helpful.

8 For every question or concern I've had I've received a  
9 timely and appropriate answer, which is astonishing

10 when you consider the state of customer service these  
11 days.

12 I cannot say enough about the benefits  
13 I've received by attending Job Club. After being on  
14 disability for as long as I have I knew I needed  
15 serious help in relearning the skills associated with  
16 returning to the work force, not to mention dealing  
17 with the anxiety and fear.

18 That I was able to discuss those  
19 concerns with others who were often going through the  
20 exact same feelings was not only supportive, but  
21 empowering. I learned ways to deal with some of the  
22 anxiety by identifying typical causes. For example,  
23 how to deal with certain questions such as what have  
24 you been doing since your last job. These were issues  
25 that many of the participants of Job Club were dealing

1 with.

2 It was at Job Club that I learned how to  
3 tweak resumes and cover letters. We conducted

4 practice interviews that gave us a chance to feel some  
5 of the normal anxiety associated with an interview and  
6 then we got feedback on what went right and what we  
7 could do to improve our technique. That alone is  
8 worth its weight in gold. I don't feel I could have  
9 gotten this much information coming from perspectives  
10 that were so similar to my own in any other venue. I  
11 would like to say that for the first time since I've  
12 been on disability I not only feel there is a good  
13 chance I will return to work, I'm actually excited by  
14 the prospect. Sincerely, T.C. Greywolf, Fairbanks,  
15 Alaska.

16 MS. BISBEE: Velja.

17 MS. ELSTAD: Is there anybody on line  
18 now that would like to testify. This is the  
19 Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation  
20 of People with Disabilities? No one on line.

21 MS. BISBEE: Pam has a testimony to  
22 read.

23 MS. STRATTON: I've been asked to read  
24 this written testimony to the Governor's Committee on  
25 Employment and Rehabilitation of People with

1 Disabilities. The author put at the bottom she wished  
2 to remain anonymous but wanted to express her  
3 appreciation.

4 Dear Governor's Committee, I'm simply  
5 writing to express my appreciation to the State of  
6 Alaska, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. For  
7 approximately 18 months I've been a client of DVR. In  
8 July of '05 DVR's Kodiak office assisted me with  
9 moving from the most remote village in the Aleutian  
10 Islands where I had been unemployed for over two  
11 years. After a month in Kodiak I was transferred to  
12 the Anchorage DVR office where I received excellent  
13 services for the next year. After one full year of  
14 regular assistance from the Anchorage office I became  
15 employed in my field.

16 Today I'm working for a wonderful  
17 organization as a professional doing the work I was  
18 trained to do. I believe the state's Vocational  
19 Rehabilitation program is absolutely essential to  
20 people with disabilities who desire meaningful work  
21 and to our society as a whole. Thank you.

